General Audiences

No Archive Warnings Apply

Multi

LEGO Ninjago

Cole/Kai/Jay Walker/Zane
Nya/P.I.X.A.L. (Ninjago)
Cole & Lloyd Garmadon & Kai & Nya & Jay Walker & Zane
Everyone & Lloyd
Everyone & Jay

Cole (Ninjago)
Kai (Ninjago)
Jay Walker
Zane (Ninjago)
Nya (Ninjago)
P.I.X.A.L. (Ninjago)
Lloyd Garmadon

Non-Sexual Age Play
Age Regression/De-Aging
Hurt/Comfort
Angst
Tooth-Rotting Fluff
Platonic Relationships
Platonic Cuddling
Sibling Bonding
Adopted Sibling Relationship
Lloyd Garmadon Needs Therapy
but he's getting it now :D

English ← Previous Work Part 2 of A Little Difference Next Work →

Sometimes

outerspaceismyhappyplace

Summary:

Lloyd's age regression is part of the team's dynamic now. Now that he's learning better coping skills and getting more therapy and support for past trauma, everything seems to be going much better for everyone. Except for Jay, who for some reason, doesn't seem to be too thrilled about this new arrangement.

Chapter 1 (http://archiveofourown.org/works/30107922/chapters/74159196) : Nya

"Hey."

"Hey."

"Can I come in?"

Lloyd only nods in response. He's curled up on his side with his back to the door and his face muffled in his stuffed dragon, most likely to cover up his tears as opposed to for actual comfort. His knees are drawn up to his chest and his breath is quiet but jagged, erratic, his shoulders shaky with every inhale.

Most of the time Lloyd doesn't mind therapy. He even likes it at times—his therapist specializes in age regression therapy and keeps all kinds of toys and games and coloring supplies in her office, which he likes to play with while they're talking because it helps calm him down. It took him a while to feel comfortable enough to do this, of course, but once he started to let himself fully regress, things had seemed to be going really well.

But crayons and little toy cars can only help so much, especially now that they've finally started digging into some deeper trauma. Today apparently hadn't gone so well.

Nya sits down on the edge of Lloyd's bed, gently running her fingers through his hair. "I heard you had a rough session today."

"I *hate* therapy." His voice is muffled and shaky but clear enough for Nya to make out the words, and when she does she feels a pang of sympathy in her chest. She tucks his hair behind his ear.

"I know," she says gently. "I know it can be really hard to talk about those things, but you're doing *so* well. I'm really proud of you."

"Well, don't."

"Don't what?"

"Don't be proud of me. I didn't do anything but cry a whole bunch."

"Yeah? Well that's a good thing. Crying is part of the process."

"So you're proud of me for crying?"

"You bet I am," Nya says enthusiastically, which elicits a small giggle out of Lloyd. He takes his dragon away from his face and hugs it against his chest.

"You must be really proud of me, then. I cried a lot."

"I *am* really proud of you. You're being really brave. You know that, right?"

Lloyd shrugs. "I guess. It's a different kind of brave that I am usually."

"It is," Nya agrees. "But sometimes it can be even harder."

There's a long stretch of silence. Lloyd sits up and rests his head on Nya's shoulder, and she wraps her arm around him, pressing a kiss to the top of his head.

Admittedly, this has been a bit of a difficult adjustment for all of them. It took a few weeks just for Lloyd to get comfortable enough to openly regress in front of all of them, and even then he was always nervous about it. But he gets so animated and carefree when playing with his action figures and toy cars, and it's not only one of the cutest things Nya's ever seen but also a huge relief.

Although there are definitely still hard days, overall Lloyd has seemed *so* much happier. He definitely would never have initiated physical contact like he did just now a few months ago.

"Do you wanna go do something together to get your mind off of things?" Nya suggests.

"Like what?"

"Anything you want. We could go draw with chalk outside, or color in your coloring books, or watch a movie, or build a blanket fort, or play a game..."

Lloyd thinks for a minute. "What if...we build a blanket fort...and then watch a movie and color *in* it?"

"That," Nya says, standing up and hoisting Lloyd up onto her hip, "sounds like an *excellent* plan."

Lloyd giggles and wipes the dried tear tracks off of his face, and Nya can practically feel her heart melt with bittersweetness. He never *got* this when he was little. He never had anyone to take care of him like this or make him feel better when he was sad or protect him when he was scared. Nya hugs him a little closer to her chest, gives him a quick kiss on the cheek, and vows, not for the first time, to make sure his second chance is better the first. They can't go back and fix the past. The best they can do is try again now.

"I have some fairy lights in my room, do you wanna use those to decorate the inside?" Nya asks, setting Lloyd down.

"Yeah!"

15 minutes and several spontaneous giggle-fits on Lloyd's part, they've constructed an admittedly impressive-looking blanket fort. The inside is lined with pillows and fairy lights, and a laptop is propped up on the side playing the movie Lilo and Stitch while Lloyd lays on his stomach happily humming under his breath with a box of crayons spilled on the floor and a coloring book spread out in front of him. "Does our fort need anything else?" asks Nya.

"Nope. It's good," Lloyd says. He pauses. "Thank you for helping me."

"No problem, bud," Nya says, tousling Lloyd's hair. "I love hanging out with you."

"I love hanging out with you too!" Lloyd chirps. "You're the best big sister ever!"

Nya has to physically restrain herself from squealing after he says this. "And you're the best little brother ever," she smiles. "Do you think w-"

"Did you really have to build your fort *right there*?"

They both look outside the fort to see a rather irritated-looking Jay standing in front of it.

"You're blocking the tv," he clarifies.

"I'm...sorry?" Nya says. "It won't stay up forever. We'll take it down in a bit."

Jay merely huffs in response.

"You...you can come in if you want. It's super cool on the inside," Lloyd says tentatively.

Jay blinks. His face stays neutral, an unreadable expression on it. "No. Maybe later," he says, in a tone of voice that makes it pretty clear "later" is not going to happen anytime soon. He leaves.

After he's gone, Lloyd frowns. "Nya? How come Jay never wants to play with me?"

"I...don't know, Lloyd." Nya pauses, furrowing her brow. "He's been pretty mean lately, hasn't he?"

Lloyd nods, a more worried look finding its way onto his face. "Does he...does he not like me anymore because I'm..."

"What? No, of course not, honey! I don't know what's going on with him, but I'm sure it has nothing to do with you. He's been mean to *everyone* lately, even his own boyfriends."

Lloyd nods again, although he doesn't really seem like he believes her.

"Lloyd," Nya says. "I *promise* Jay still loves you. I don't know why he's been acting so grumpy lately, but I *do* know that he will always be your brother, no matter what. Got it?"

Lloyd looks back outside the fort again, even though Jay's already left. "...Got it."

Chapter 2 (http://archiveofourown.org/works/30107922/chapters/75762266) : Zane

Notes:

I'm so sorry it took so long for me to update! I've been stressed and sick for a while and also was kinda upset by a post I saw saying bad things about the agere community, so I had to take a break for a while.

I'm feeling better now, though, so hopefully I won't go so long in between chapters without updating again!

Lloyd is not normally a particularly touchy-feely person. This makes a lot of sense, considering that he probably didn't get many hugs at Darkly's, where he spent the vast majority of his life before he moved in with the ninja. He wasn't used to physical contact and it made him feel uncomfortable, so no one pushed it.

It didn't really change when he got older. In fact, in some ways it got worse. Lloyd was under a lot of pressure being the leader and most powerful member of the team as young as he was. He hated showing vulnerability though, so he never really let anyone comfort him even when he really needed it.

Lloyd still isn't really that into hugs when he's not regressed, and that's fine. When he *is* feeling little, though, he has an entirely different perspective on the matter.

Which is definitely a good thing. The whole purpose of Lloyd's regression is to give him a second chance at having a normal childhood, and hugs and physical affection are important parts of childhood development. And...things that he sort of missed out on the first time.

…Although logically he knows he can't entirely blame himself, Zane feels responsible that Lloyd's isolating habit got as bad as it did. He'd had suspicions for a while about what was going on, but he didn't say anything. Even after he had told his partners, he had elected to wait for Lloyd to come to them first to try and avoid an uncomfortable conversation. But of course, Lloyd being Lloyd, he did no such thing.

Zane still isn't sure what extent the nightmares and panic attacks went to before Lloyd started openly regressing, but the few that he's witnessed after the fact don't really do much to quell his guilt over not having done anything sooner. Seeing a trembling, panicked, and sobbing Lloyd is heart-wrenching enough even when he *is* there to hug him and help him calm down; Zane doesn't even want to *think* about what it must have been like for Lloyd when he was dealing with this all by himself.

It doesn't do any good to dwell on the past like that, though. Things are finally going okay now.

"Hello, Lloyd," Zane says, as Lloyd wordlessly climbs onto his lap.

Lloyd mumbles a reply and rests his head on Zane's shoulder.

"What are you doing up so late?" asks Cole. "I thought you already went to bed."

"Not sleepy," he claims, incredibly unconvincingly.

"You're not?" Zane raises an eyebrow.

"No," Lloyd confirms. "Wanna...watch Finding Nemo."

"I think it's a little late to be starting a movie, bud," Cole says. "It's almost ten thirty."

"I stay up way past ten thirty all the time," Lloyd argues.

"Lloyd." Zane shifts so he can make eye-contact with him. "Is there any particular reason you don't want to go to bed?"

Lloyd pauses for a moment. "Yeah. I don't wanna be 'lone right now. I feel scared."

It seems a little strange that hearing that coming from Lloyd would elicit the particular reaction that it does, but more than anything, Zane feels *relieved*. Lloyd *definitely* wouldn't have admitted that a few months ago, no matter how many times he was asked.

"Is that...okay?" Lloyd mumbles.

"Of course that's okay, buddy," Cole assures him gently. "I'm really glad you told us."

"Indeed," Zane adds. "I'm very proud of you. What can we do to help?"

Lloyd shrugs. "I dunno." He lowers his voice. "I want another night-light."

"I think we have another one," Cole says. "It's Jay's, but we usually all sleep in Zane's room now so he probably won't miss it if we take it out of his room."

Lloyd's silent for another moment, before tentatively asking, "He's not gonna be mad at me, right?"

"No, of course he won't be mad at you."

"Jay gets mad at me a lot."

There's another pause.

"He's been getting mad at everyone lately," Zane says finally. "I'm not sure why, but I'm sure it has nothing to do with you."

"That's what Nya said."

"Well, she's right."

"But..." Lloyd swallows. "What *does* it have to do with?"

"I don't know right now," Cole says. "You don't need to worry about it, though. Let's get you to bed, okay? I can read you a story while Zane gets you the other nightlight. How does that sound?"

Lloyd nods, and raises his arms so Cole can lift him up off of Zane's lap and hoist him onto his hip.

Zane goes down the hallway to Jay's room.

Admittedly, Jay has definitely been acting a bit strangely lately, and he and their other boyfriends are a little worried. It's not unlike Jay to occasionally get unnecessarily snippy, but he's been acting unusually irritable for weeks now. He hasn't been seeming like himself.

When Zane opens the door, he's surprised to see that Jay is here. "I thought you and Kai went to bed already," he says.

Jay shrugs. He's sitting on the edge of his bed, looking down at his feet, in the dim light from the lamp at the bedside.

Zane sits next to him. "Is everything okay?" he asks.

Jay doesn't answer. Instead, he asks, "You're gonna take my nightlight?"

"Oh. You heard that conversation?"

"Yeah."

"Well. Um. Yes? You don't usually sleep in your room, so I figured th-"

"Well, I am tonight."

"Why?"

"Kai kicked me out."

Zane blanks at him. "No he didn't. Kai would never kick you out of our room."

"Fine. He didn't kick me out. He was being a jerk, though, so I don't wanna sleep with you guys tonight. So don't take my nightlight. Lloyd already has one. He doesn't need mine."

There's a few moments of silence. Zane gently tucks Jay's hair behind his ear and presses a kiss against his temple. "Alright, love. If you're sure. I think Nya and Pixal have a lava lamp in their room, I'll ask if we can borrow it for Lloyd. If you change your mind anytime during the night you're more than welcome to come back. We'll miss you."

Jay doesn't answer, just stares straight ahead at the wall.

Zane frowns. "Goodnight, darling."

"'Night."

"I love you."

"Yeah...love you too."

Not sure what else to do, Zane leaves.

Chapter 3 (http://archiveofourown.org/works/30107922/chapters/76098548) : Pixal

“Lloyd, you don't need to apologize."

"I'm sorry anyway," Lloyd mutters stubbornly. "I messed everything up."

"No you didn't. You did what you were supposed to do, which is tell us if you slip and need to go home."

"But I wasn't *s'possed* to slip. I just wanted to do a mission and I was fine but then I fell and just all of the sudden I...Pixal, what if I can never go on missions again? What I'm just a...useless baby? What i-"

"Lloyd." Pixal cuts him off. Lloyd looks up at her from his position sitting on the floor with teary eyes, and she kneels down so that they're eye-level. "This is only the *second* mission you've been on since we got the city back from Garmadon.

You need to be patient with yourself. You are *not* a useless baby, you are one of the strongest people I've ever met, and *nothing* is ever going to change that, okay?"

Lloyd sniffs. "Not even when I'm little?"

"*Especially* then."

Lloyd nods slowly. He's still obviously pretty angry with himself, but unfortunately Pixal doesn't think any amount of reassurances are going to change that right now. It's going to take some time before he's ever going to be able to fully accept this part of himself. The only thing she can do is let him know that *she* accepts it. Lloyd sniffs again, wiping the bangs out of his eyes with an uncoordinated hand.

"Now," says Pixal. "You need a bath. You're covered in mud."

"'S 'cause I fell in the mud."

"Yes, I know."

"It was really stupid."

"It was slippery. Kai fell, too."

"Oh," says Lloyd.

"Do you want to do it yourself, or would you like some help?"

He doesn't answer, which Pixal guesses means the second option.

"It's alright. I can help you if you'd like."

Lloyd nods tentatively and stands up, taking Pixal's hand as she leads him to the bathroom. (He leaves muddy footprints all over the floor, but you know what? She'll deal with that later.)

"No one's ever gave me a bath before," Lloyd says quietly, watching Pixal turn on the water.

"Ever?"

"No. Well, probably when I was a baby, but I don't remember. I just did everything by myself most of the time."

Pixal already knew that, but it doesn't stop her from getting mad about it all over again hearing it from Lloyd. "Well," she says gently, swallowing her anger to refrain from upsetting him. "You don't have to worry about that anymore. Now you don't need to do everything by yourself." She pauses. "I don't think we ever got any bath toys for you, did we? We do have bubble bath solution, though, do you want bubbles?"

Lloyd nods. "My cars can go in water. Can I go get them?"

"No, you're all covered in mud. How about I get them while you get in the bath, alright?"

"Okay. I want the orange one with purple wheels and the blue one that has glow-in-the-dark windows."

"Alright. I'll be right back."

After somehow managing to find the exact two cars Lloyd requested in his enormous box of hotwheels (she doesn't have any idea how he managed to acquire so many in such a short amount of time, because even if Kai *does* buy him a new

one every time he drives him home from therapy, that only makes about twelve and he has at *least* thirty...) she goes back to the bathroom to shut off the water. Lloyd's sitting with his knees drawn up to his chest, a conflicted look on his face.

"Everything okay?" Pixal asks. Lloyd takes the cars from her and carefully sets them on the side of the tub.

"Um. Yeah, I just...I changed my mind. I wanna do it by myself."

"What? Are you sure?"

"Y-yeah. An' I can clean my gi, too. And the floor, 'cause I gotted it all muddy." His speech is slipping, adopting the more childlike tone he gets when he's regressed to under the age of six.

Pixal frowns. "You don't need to, Lloyd, I'm more than happy to help out."

Lloyd doesn't respond. He looks away, biting his lip.

Pixal kneels down. "Can you please tell me what's going on?"

"I, I just..." his eyes are watering, and his bottom lip quivering. "I d-don't *need* help."

"Maybe you don't," Pixal says slowly, "but it's okay to *want* help every once in a while."

Lloyd shakes his head.

"Yes it is. I promise."

"But I'm...you sh-shouldn't need to help me. 'Specially 'cause I always did ev'ything by myself when I was little for real. An' I'm not even a r-real kid anymore."

"Lloyd, *you should not have needed* to do everything by yourself when you were little the first time. Kids are supposed to have people that love them and take care of them. You didn't get that, and that's the whole point of this whole thing...you get a second chance, and I want it to be better, because you deserve it. You've been *so* strong for all of us, love. Will you please let us take care of you now?"

There are tears rolling down his cheeks, but he's silent as he nods.

"Thank you."

"F-for what?"

"For letting me take care of you."

"Oh. Um. You're welcome?"

The others don't come home until later, when Lloyd, his gi, and the floor have all been cleaned and Lloyd is in bed. (In retrospect she should have left the floor the way it was, because everyone else ends up tracking mud all over, too.)

"Ugh. That was exhausting," Nya mutters. "It was raining the whole time and the place was in the middle of *nowhere*, and...anyway. How's Lloyd?"

"He's alright," says Pixal. "I'll tell you about it later once you're not covered in mud. I might even kiss you, too."

"That's fair," Nya snorts. "I'm gonna go take a quick shower. See you in a bit."

"So...are the rest of us just gonna stand around in the living room until you're done?" Jay whines. "I'm *tired*."

Nya rolls her eyes and ignores him.

"I know you're tired," Zane says sympathetically. "We all are. How about you and me go next? Usually you like it when I wash your hair for you, right?"

There's an anxious edge to Zane's voice and a tense silence that sweeps over the room after he asks this question. Pixal furrows her brows, watching the way Jay shifts uncomfortably and looks at his feet. Jay's behavior has probably never been able to be described as "normal" for as long as she's known him—he's a bit eccentric. But they've all noticed the way he hasn't been seeming like himself lately.

Jay takes a deep breath and finally gives his answer. "No thanks," he says quietly. "I can go last if you want, but I kind of just wanna do it by myself."

Chapter 4 (http://archiveofourown.org/works/30107922/chapters/76822802): Cole

Notes:

(See the end of the chapter for notes (#chapter_4_endnotes).)

"

Jay, why...why are you sleeping on the floor?"

Jay's eyes flutter open, a confused look on his face. "Huh?" he says. "What are you doing here?"

Cole pauses for a minute, looking back at Jay's empty bed. After taking a shower (that he took alone, which is strange, considering how clingy he usually gets when he's tired) Jay had gone back to his own room for the *third* night in a row instead of staying with Cole and Zane and Kai.

There's definitely something bothering him, but besides a few obvious examples of him trying to avoid them, most of what he's been acting like lately has just been plain *weird*, like getting ridiculously territorial about his comic books and collectible action figures, or complaining about the same brand of mangoes that they've been getting for the last seven years, or, uh...sleeping on the floor in the far corner of his room when he has two beds to choose from, one of which also comes with his three boyfriends.

"You slept in pretty late this morning so I came to check and make sure you're okay. What are *you* doing here?"

"Sleeping," Jay slurs, closing his eyes again and pushing Cole's face away.

"Yes, I can see that," Cole frowns. "But why are you on the floor instead of in bed?"

Jay shrugs, yawning. "I dunno. I just felt like sleeping on the floor."

"But why?"

"I dunno."

"Well there has to be *some* reason."

"No. I just felt like it."

"Um. Okay? Well, uh...do you wanna get up now?"

"No. I'm really tired. I didn't sleep good."

"Why not?"

Jay ponders this for a minute. "I think because I'm on the floor."

Cole stares at him. "Wh- then why are you on the floor?"

"I forgot."

Cole gives an exasperated sigh and sits next to Jay with his back against the wall. Jay hits his head on the nightlight directly above him, halfheartedly takes it out of the outlet and chucks it across the room, puts his head on Cole's lap, and closes his eyes again. "You've been acting really weird lately," says Cole, running his hand through Jay's hair. "Like...even more than usual. Are you sure everything's okay?"

"Mm-hmm."

"...Alright. Well, if you're gonna go back to sleep, will you at least sleep in an actual bed?"

"I guess," Jay sighs. "You have to carry me, though. I'm too tired to walk."

Cole snorts. "Okay, princess."

"'M not a princess. I'm just a..." he yawns, "a sleepy ninja."

Cole stifles another laugh and scoops Jay up, depositing him on the bed and tucking him in. "Okay, my sleepy ninja. Do you need anything else?"

"No," says Jay. "You can go home now."

"...We are home."

"I know, I meant, like...out." Jay gestures vaguely to the door. "Get out, please. Sorry."

"That's okay. I hope you get some better sleep this time." Cole kisses Jay on the forehead and then leaves, gently closing the door behind him.

"Was he okay?" Kai asks, after Cole goes back to the living room and sits down on the couch next to him.

"Yeah, I...I think so? He was on the *floor*, though, in the corner of his room, which was...weird."

"Well. I gotta say I'm not really surprised at this point," Kai points out.

"True." Cole agrees. He yawns. "Where's Zane?"

Kai starts to respond, but a loud "CAPTAIN LLOYD, WE MUST ABANDON THE SHIP! IT'S TOO RISKY!" from the other room is a pretty good answer.

"NEVER! WE CAN STILL ESCAPE! STEER THE SHIP INTO THAT ASTEROID FIELD!"

"NOT THE ASTEROID FIELD! WE'LL NEVER MAKE IT OUT IN ONE PIECE!"

"DON'T WORRY, LIEUTENANT! I HAVE A PLAN! EXECUTE EVASIVE MANEUVERS!"

Kai grins at the enthusiasm in both his boyfriend's and his little brother's voices. "Have you ever seen 'Captain Lloyd' so excited about anything else?"

"Can't say I have," Cole replies. "Apparently Zane does the best voices. He always complains about mine."

"Yeah, he does that to me, too," Kai snorts. "I guess we need to watch more Starfarer movies. Either that or become nindroids who can just...effortlessly download different voice patterns.

"Heh, I guess so. Usually Jay watches them all the time but...he hasn't lately, has he?"

"No...I guess he hasn't."

Cole starts to reply, but before he does Lloyd bounds into the room and exclaims, "Hi! Do you wanna play with me and Zane? It would be really fun, even though you're not very good at it."

Despite having just been bluntly insulted right to their faces, it's not like they're gonna say *no*, so Kai gives a dramatic salute and says, "of course. Where to, cap?"

"I don't know! Cole's the navigator now, he can decide!"

"Uh, okay, what about planet kitchen to pick up some lunch?"

"And more of the missing purple magic fuel crystals that we're hunting."

"Oh, right. Can't forget those."

Notes:

A little shorter and filler-y than usual, but I figured we could all use some fluff after the Seabound finale...I've cried at least four times about it already 😅 (Might actually write smth for it [separate from this series] just to help process it. I mean it was fantastic but MAN it was rough.)

Chapter 5 (http://archiveofourown.org/works/30107922/chapters/77152253): Kai

Notes:

(See the end of the chapter for notes (#chapter_5_endnotes).)

There are definitely better ways to be woken up at seven o'clock in the morning (which is, to Kai, an ungodly hour on a Saturday) than to the sound of your little brother and recently inexplicably volatile boyfriend yelling at each other over Fritz Donnegan action figures from down the hall. Kai can think of at least eleven off the top of his head, and actually, none of them include *any* amount of yelling at *all*.

But apparently he's not getting breakfast in bed or any kisses from any Prince Charmings who call him Sleeping Beauty, or morning snuggles, or gentle "hey, sweetpea, it's time to wake up"s, or even not-so-gentle "hey, hot stuff, it's almost eleven o'clock, get out of bed already!"s.

Nope. Today he gets Lloyd and Jay yelling at each other over Fritz Donnegan action figures.

"I was just looking!" Lloyd insists. "I didn't even touch them! Even though they're toys and you're *supposed* to play with them!"

"They're not *toys*," Jay spits. "They're limited edition action figure collectibles, and they're *not* for playing with."

"What are they for, then?"

"They're for *collecting*."

"Collecting *dust*?"

"No! Just...go away! Don't touch my stuff!"

"I didn't even touch them, though! I was just looking!"

Groaning, Kai rolls over in bed and buries his face in a pillow for a moment before deciding that he should probably intervene.

"No looking at my stuff either! You're not allowed in my room! Get out!"

"Fine! You can't come in my room either!"

"Well, good! I don't *wanna* go in your room! It's a stupid-looking room! You know nothing about internal decor!"

"Why would I need to? I'm a ninja!"

"Not right now you're not! You're just a-"

"Jay! What the heck!" Kai interrupts. "What's going on?"

Jay makes a frustrated noise and points an accusatory finger at Lloyd. "He was touching my stuff!"

"I was not!" Lloyd insists. "I was just looking!"

"You're not supposed to be in my room anyway! Kai, he was in my room!"

"Did he *know* he wasn't supposed to be in your room?"

"Well...no. But he *does* know that he's not supposed to touch my action figures."

"But he *didn't* touch them. Technically he was following all the rules that you said *out loud*. But you can't get mad at people for crossing boundaries that only you know about," Kai says.

Jay scowls, unable to think of a counter-argument for that.

"So...Lloyd, from now on, please don't go in Jay's room. Jay, don't yell at Lloyd. Are we good?"

Lloyd looks disappointed, but he nods his head and goes back to his own room.

"Jay, please try to be patient with him?" Kai sighs. "I know it's kind of hard to understand, but even though he *looks* like he's the same age as us, h-"

"It's not hard to understand."

Kai stops. He stares at Jay, trying to decipher the expression on his face, but it's unreadable except for the fact that he's mad at him, which was already pretty apparent. "Um. Okay? Well, if you understand that, then you understand that sometimes you need to be the bigger person."

"You always take his side," Jay mutters.

"Did...did you not hear a word I just said? I take his side because he doesn't *know* any better. You, on the other hand, *do*. You *should*, anyways."

Jay shuts his mouth, gaze fixated intently at the floor, and doesn't respond for a moment. Then, "Yeah. I know. I got it. Thanks. Goodbye. Get out."

"Wait, b-"

Jay slams the door in his face.

Kai stands there dumbfounded for a moment before hesitantly pressing his ear against the wood. He hears Jay lock the door and pace around his room for a minute before a loud crash sounds, like he's just knocked all his action figures off the display table they were on. "Jay?" Kai says.

Jay throws himself onto his bed and yells, "GO AWAY!" at the top of his lungs.

Kai stares at the door, baffled. "*No*," he says. "I'm not leaving. You're gonna open this door and you're gonna tell me what's been going on with you. Please, Jay. We're all really worried."

He gets nothing but silence in response for an entire minute. Just as he's about to repeat himself, Jay finally speaks again. "What's going on with me right now," he says, his voice much quieter and calmer, although there's still obviously an edge to it, "is I am going to go back to bed. I'm just really tired."

"But-"

"Goodbye, Kai."

"But *Jay*-"

"But nothing. Go away."

Kai hates himself for it, but he does.

Notes:

Sorry this chapter's so short—don't worry, I'll make up for it with the last two ;)

ALSO! I'm sorry I usually don't respond to comments, I just have anxiety and get nervous about it. Please know that I appreciate each and every one of them and they encourage me so much! I love my readers immensely!

Chapter 6 (http://archiveofourown.org/works/30107922/chapters/77443058): Lloyd

Waking up in the middle of the night used to almost always mean nightmares and insomnia, hours spent trying to muffle his panicked sobs so that he wouldn't bother anyone, and a guaranteed energy level of approximately zero for the rest of the day.

Thankfully, that's not the case anymore.

Learning that it was okay to go wake up his older siblings if he needed them was one of the hardest parts of this whole thing, but they've *never* gotten mad at him, no matter how stupid Lloyd feels like the reason is.

Zane has no problem getting him ibuprofen at two in the morning because his head hurts and he can't remember what dose he's supposed to take. Cole has never turned him down when he needs a hug, even if it's the dead of night and they're all exhausted from a hard day of training. Even though he felt so utterly mortified he couldn't even look her in the eyes,

once Nya not only helped him clean up when he wet the bed after a particularly upsetting nightmare, but also let him sleep with her and Pixal the rest of the night because she could tell he felt scared about going back to his own room.

Despite how unfavorable the rest of his life has been up to this point, Lloyd feels pretty lucky now.

He is currently kind of bored, though. And wide awake.

Darn. He should have known taking a three hour nap in the afternoon would mess with his sleep schedule.

Giving up trying to fall back asleep, Lloyd flicks on the lamp on his nightstand and gets his stack of comics out from under his bed.

He, Kai, and Jay used to borrow each other's comics all the time, but Kai never gives them back and Jay, lately, has been a jerk.

(Jay's actually currently in possession of *Lloyd's* favorite comic, and has been for months, but Lloyd has no desire to ask for it back at the moment, seeing as Jay will use anything as an excuse to get mad at people nowadays.)

Not to mention it seems that Lloyd has been regressing so often lately that he often can't even *read* very well by himself. His therapist says it won't always be like that and that there's nothing wrong with needing it a little more often in certain stages of therapy. But that doesn't make his current situation much less frustrating.

He hates feeling helpless. He's *never* been helpless. He had to fend for himself when he was little for real, and now that he's not physically a kid anymore, he hates the feeling of needing people to take care of him. Of course it's gotten better now that he's more used to it, but even though now the feeling-guilty-about-it piece is a little better, it's also just plain annoying.

Right now he's feeling his physical age, though. Comfortably, without fighting for it, which is admittedly a definite benefit of letting himself regress when he needs to.

He yawns—not because he's tired, just because that happens for no reason sometimes—and opens his second favorite comic book.

He does not get very far before a disconcerting loud thud from across the hall startles him.

Lloyd gets up and opens his door, glancing at the room across from his—it's Jay's room that the noise seemed to have come from. The light in his room flicks on, which Lloyd can see under the crack in the door.

It's quiet for a moment. Jay paces back and fourth for a minute before the light flicks back off. Lloyd can hear him breathing from all the way across the hall—it's shaky and ragged and panicked and accompanied by what is unmistakably the sound of muffled sobs.

Although *he* can hear it, it's definitely not loud enough to wake up Zane and Cole and Kai at the other end of the hall, and Lloyd has a feeling Jay has no intention of doing that himself. If he did, he probably wouldn't be all the way down here alone in his own room instead of with his boyfriends in the first place...

Lloyd bites his lip. Jay wants to be left alone. That's been made abundantly clear by the fact that "leave me alone" has seemed to be his favorite phrase lately. He probably wouldn't be very happy with *anyone* if they went to check on him, let alone Lloyd, who he's been particularly snippy towards. But ignoring him doesn't feel right either. Lloyd knocks on the door.

"Hey, Jay?" he says. "Is...is everything okay?"

Jay chokes, letting out a noise of surprise. "Y-yeah, I'm...I'm fine," he responds, in a voice that confirms, if it hadn't been already, that he is most definitely *not* fine.

Lloyd pauses. "Are you sure? Can I come in?"

"Shouldn't you be asleep?"

"Shouldn't *you* be asleep?"

"I *was*. I just...woke up."

"Why?"

Jay is silent. After a moment, he opens his door, looking as annoyed as someone in pajamas with bedhead and tear tracks down their cheeks can look. "What do you want?"

"I just wanted to make sure you're okay. Is there anything I can do to help?"

Jay looks down at the floor for a moment and sniffs. "No."

"Well...can I come in anyway?"

To Lloyd's surprise, Jay obliges, opening the door the rest of the way and stepping out of the way. He sits down on the edge of his bed, knees pulled up to his chest. Apparently he's forgotten about his Lloyd-not-being-allowed-in-his-bedroom rule. Either that or he's...just that desperate for company.

Lloyd sits next to him. Jay starts as if he's about to move away from him, but he doesn't. He sniffs again, wiping away his tears. "Why are you awake anyway? Isn't it way past your bedtime?"

"I don't have a bedtime right now. I'm not little," says Lloyd.

"Why?"

"Because...I don't need to be?"

Jay looks up at him curiously. "Oh. How...how do you know if you *do* need to be?"

"If I'm feeling extra overwhelmed or stressed out, or if I'm having a rough day, I guess. I've got it better under control now so for the most part I'm in control of whether I'm little or not. But if I don't let myself regress, then I loose control over it and I can slip without trying to."

"What does slipping feel like?"

"It's, uh...it's kind of hard to explain. My brain will start feeling fuzzy and I'll start thinking like a kid. With non-intentional slips it doesn't really feel good. The lack of control is scary. But if it's a good day then it makes me feel a lot safer and calmer."

"Do you regress to the same age every time or is it different?"

Lloyd pauses, looking at Jay strangely. "What are we doing, an interview?"

Jay seems embarrassed, averting his eyes. "N-No, I was just wondering. You don't have to answer if you don't want to."

"No, it's...okay. Yeah, usually I'm somewhere between four and eight. When I slip unintentionally I usually end up more on the younger side. I don't know why. It seems sort of counter-productive to me, because that's only going to make me more freaked out."

"So before...before you started going to therapy and all that, you just...didn't let yourself be little, right?"

"That's...what I *tried* to do. It kind of had the opposite effect, though. It's my best coping skill. Not letting myself use it makes me need it more, which makes me more likely to loose control of my headspace, which makes me even more freaked out..." he trails off. "Why do you care anyway? You always act really annoyed when I'm little. You're kind of a jerk sometimes."

"Am not!"

"That's what it seems like!"

"Well, it's not..." Jay bites his lip. "I'm sorry. I'm...not trying to be mean. It doesn't have anything to do with *you* exactly, it's just..." he trails off.

Lloyd eyes him curiously. There's something about the way Jay anxiously wrings his hands together, staring into space as if he's deep in thought that seems oddly familiar.

Jay's breath hitches, and Lloyd catches a flash of panic in his eyes as he swiftly wipes away another stray tears and mumbles, "You can go back to your own room now."

And *that's* when it clicks.

Jay really *isn't* being mean on purpose.

He's *jealous*.

And, it seems, currently teetering on the edge of a headspace he's for some reason scared of anyone seeing.

Lloyd stares at Jay for a moment, at a loss of what to do.

Which is kind of stupid. It's not like anyone else would be better at handling this situation than him. If he were in Jay's shoes—and he *was*, pretty much, a few months ago—what would he need to hear? A flat-out "do you age-regress" would probably freak him out and he wouldn't give an honest answer anyway.

"Lloyd, can you leave?" Jay repeats. His voice is wobbly. Lloyd looks at him.

"Did you have a nightmare?"

Jay looks away, blush clashing with his freckles. "Y-yeah, I did. It's not a big deal. 'M over it now."

"Well...actually, I had a nightmare too," Lloyd lies. "That's why I'm awake. I think...I think *I* would feel better if I *didn't* go back to my own room by myself. Is that okay with you?"

Jay stares back at him. "I...um." He swallows. "Okay. If...if it would make *you* feel better..."

"It would," Lloyd confirms. "Where do you want me to sleep?"

Jay stares at the floor. "My bed's big enough for two people, I think," he mumbles. "I-if you want. I mean. I...s-sometimes *I* feel better if I'm...with someone else. It...but I mean...if you don't...that's kind of weird, isn't it?" He tapers off and awkwardly wraps his arms around himself.

"No, that's not weird," Lloyd assures him. "Is it okay with you?"

"Yeah," Jay whispers. "If...it would...help?"

”It would.”

It’s not a lie. Feeling Jay snuggle up against his chest and gradually relax as he falls asleep and slips his thumb into his mouth really does make Lloyd feel a whole lot better.

Chapter 7 (http://archiveofourown.org/works/30107922/chapters/77997731): Jay

Notes:

(See the end of the chapter for notes (#chapter_7_endnotes).)

Jay is selfish.

He knows that. He knows that it actually makes sense for Lloyd, because of all the unimaginable trauma he's been through *plus* the fact that he literally *did* miss out on most of his childhood. Lloyd deserves it. Lloyd deserves to be babied sometimes, to slip into a younger headspace where he doesn't need to worry about anything because everyone always coos and fusses over him and attends to his every need.

But no matter how many times Jay tries to tell himself that, and no matter how guilty and selfish and awful it makes him feel, there's still a part of him that's inconsolable when he sees all the attention Lloyd gets.

Because Jay wants it to be *him*.

Even though that doesn't even make any sense.

Maybe it does make him feel happier and relaxed and maybe it does do wonders for his anxiety, but even though he's probably been regressing for much longer than Lloyd has, that's because he *wanted* to. Not because he *needs* to.

He's the only one of them who grew up with both his parents. (Even if they're not actually his parents. But that's off-topic.) Besides everything that's happened since he's become a ninja (which doesn't count since everyone else on the team have pretty much been through all the same things), nothing bad has ever even *happened* to him.

He doesn't need it. *Shouldn't* need it.

He should be fine just doing what he's always done—letting his Little behaviors bleed into his every day life just enough to make him feel better but not to make anyone suspicious. Yes, of *course* he wishes he could be honest about it. He's always wanted that. But there was simply too much explanation required, too much of a chance that it could ruin their relationship and that they'd think it was weird and wouldn't want him anymore. It was much less risky to let everyone believe he was just immature.

It was never a problem for him until it *was* a problem for *Lloyd*.

And now he has to watch his little brother get the attention he's wanted for years but always thought was out of the question.

...Not that it's anymore in the question that it was before. It's just unobtainable for different reasons now.

He rolls over. Lloyd's side of the bed is cold, indicating he's been gone for a while and probably not coming back. Jay feels oddly disappointed and—not oddly, just irrationally—betrayed. Last night he'd been too distracted (...and little) to pick up on the fact that Lloyd had obviously *not* had a nightmare and was just offering to stay because he thought *Jay* could use the company.

Upon replaying their conversation in his head this morning, Jay throws his arm over his face and curses under his breath. *He's* not supposed to be the one being comforted. He's the one who should be the most put-together out of all of them.

He's fine! He's *Jay!* He's the funny one! The comic relief! The comic relief isn't supposed to have *feelings*. It's bad enough that they all have to deal with his panic attacks already. He needs to suck it up and get it together. He should not be accepting comfort from *anyone*, let alone *Lloyd*. He's not...*important* enough for that.

Stupidly, Jay feels a lump form in his throat, which is really the last thing he needs right now.

He rolls over again, knees pulled up to his chest and back to the door, and closes his eyes again. He'll get over it. He's fine.

He's fine, he's fine, he's fine, he's fine, he's fine, he's fi-

There's a knock on the door, and Jay is *not* fine. "Go away!" he snaps.

They do not go away. Jay sits up and glares at Zane.

"I said go away."

"I heard you," is Zane's only response, and he sits down on the bed next to him. He reaches his hand out to tuck Jay's hair behind his ear, but Jay flinches and bats his arm away. He regrets it afterwards, seeing the sad look on Zane's face as he pulls away, but does nothing to show it.

"What are you doing here?" Jay spits, sitting up.

"I was going to ask you the same thing."

"This is my room, dummy, why wouldn't I be here?"

Zane shrugs. "I do not know. I suppose that's fair. I was just wondering when you were coming back, Jay—we really miss you."

"Usually you're asleep when you go to sleep. It's not like you know I'm not there the majority of the time."

"Maybe at night, but I am actually *quite* aware most of the time that you aren't here."

Jay blinks. "I *am* here."

"You are here *physically*," Zane agrees. "But I sense your mind is elsewhere, is it not?

Jay shrugs. "I've always been a daydreamer, Zane."

"This is different."

Zane's tone is gentle, but firm. *Knowing*. Jay bites his lip and doesn't reply.

"Can I ask you something?" Zane says.

"Sure."

"Are you jealous?"

Jay's stomach flips and panic rings through his mind, but he feigns innocence. "Of who?"

"You know who."

No. Lloyd figured it out, didn't he? Maybe that's why he left this morning. Maybe he went and blabbed on him and now Zane's here to kick him off the team because they don't want him anymore now that they know what a weak, selfish, pathetic excuse for a ninja he is. Tears gather in Jay's eyes, and the lump that had never left his throat is becoming harder to ignore. He squirms in his seat and shakes his head.

"Jay, darling," Zane soothes, "you're not in trouble. Can I go get Kai and Cole really quick? I didn't want you to feel intimidated by all three of us being here, but I do think it would be better if we could all talk about this together. You didn't do anything wrong, alright? We just want to talk."

No, Jay thinks, *no, no, please no, that's that* last *thing I want. This can't be happening.* He feels himself nod.

Zane leaves, and Jay seriously considers climbing out the window and just never coming back. They're just going to kick him out anyway, right? It would be much easier if he did it himself. Then he wouldn't have to hear them tell him to leave.

He doesn't get very far with that plan, though. They're back before he can move.

Jay inadvertently lets out a sob when he feels Kai's hand on his shoulder. Kai retreats it immediately, startled. "Woah, hey, buddy, none of that," he says quickly, kneeling down so that he's eye-level with Jay.

Buddy. Kai has all sorts of weird nicknames for them, but the only person he's ever called *buddy* before is Lloyd, almost exclusively when he's regressed. And Jay's not eve-

Oh. Actually, on second thought, maybe he *is* regressed right now. He doesn't know when *that* happened, but there's definitely no way he's going to be able to pull himself back out now; he's too panicked.

What is he gonna do now? He doesn't have anywhere else to go but his parents' place, but would they even want him anymore if they knew what happened? His *real* parents hadn't even wanted them, had they? "I'm sorry!" Jay chokes. "I-I'm sorry, I..."

"Baby, why are you apologizing?" Cole says.

Jay sobs. "Nothing bad ever even *h-happened* to me. I got to be a k-kid and I...I pr-probably had it *better* than any-...than, than anyone else on the t-team, an' I...I don't...I don't *deserve* it. I shouldn't *need* it and I sh-shouldn't *want* it an' I'm just...I'm so *selfish*, an' I'm sorry...I-I'm sorry, I..." he breaks off into sobs, covering his face with his hands.

He screws his eyes shut, expecting ridicule, a lecture about how he's so selfish, about how Lloyd actually *needs* it and that he's just being a spoiled brat.

Instead, to his surprise, he feels Kai tenderly kiss him on the forehead and Zane gently take his hands away from his face. "You're not selfish," Cole whispers, tucking Jay's hair behind his ear. "Nobody's angry with you and you're not in trouble."

"But I...I thought..."

"Age regression is a coping mechanism, Jay," Zane says. "Childhood trauma is not the only reason one would use it."

"Yeah. Going by your logic, you're not allowed to do breathing exercises either because you don't have an undead demigod warlord for a father," Kai points out. "Doesn't that sound ridiculous? If those are the requirements for getting to feel better, then I'm pretty sure that makes Lloyd the only person in the world who gets to feel better. And you don't believe that, do you?"

Jay shakes his head slowly, sniffing. "B-but I...but I thought..."

"Honey, is *that* the reason you haven't been being honest with us? Because you thought you weren't...what, you didn't think you were *traumatized* enough?" Kai says. "That's..."

"It doesn't make sense!" Jay insists. "Why...why this? Why me? I mean, I d-don't...bad things have happened to you too. Why is it *me* who..."

"Some people cope differently than others," says Cole. "It's that simple. This makes you feel better, and it's not hurting anyone or anything, so there's no reason why you shouldn't be allowed to do it. What *is* hurting you is keeping all of this to yourself." He presses a kiss to Jay's temple. "We love you *so* much, sweetheart. There's nothing you can tell us that'll make us love you any less, okay?"

There's a few moments of silence before Jay bursts into tears again.

Cole gathers Jay in his arms, gently shushing him and kissing his head again.

"Did you really not know that?" Zane asks quietly.

"I...I j-just forget...sometimes, I g-guess," Jay chokes.

"Well. We'll be sure to remind you more often now," Kai promises. He kisses Jay on the cheek, carding his fingers through his hair.

They sit there for a while, all four of them, until Jay's calmed down. He takes a shaky breath and pulls away. "So...now what?"

"That's up to you," Kai says. He wipes away Jay's tears with his thumb. "How do you want this to work?"

"I...don't know," Jay mumbles. "I...didn't think it would ever actually...I-I mean, it's...I..."

"That's alright, darling, we'll figure it out together," Zane assures him. "Right now, what do you want to do?"

Jay bites his lip, deep in thought for a moment. "I wanna play with my Fritz Donnegan action figures."

"Oh, we can do that! Zane's even downloaded the voice patterns, so he can sound exactly like the characters," Cole says.

"No, actually...I meant with Lloyd." Jay sniffs and wipes his nose on his sleeve, smiling sheepishly. "I think...I've been hogging them."

Notes:

Thank you all so much for reading—I rarely ever reply to comments but I promise I read them all! They make me so happy! I'm extremely grateful to each and every one of you. I was really skeptical starting this series because there are almost no age regression fanfics in this fandom, so I'm still really surprised at how much attention it's gotten lol. Doesn't seem like too much compared to other fics on this platform but I wasn't really expecting anyone to read it at all so it seems like a lot to me!

To be honest, I'm not entirely sure what I'm going to do with this series now. I do have a few one-shot ideas, one of which is in the works right now, but any suggestions would be appreciated!

Series this work belongs to:

- ← Previous Work (http://archiveofourown.org/works/29297793) Part 2 of A Little Difference (http://archiveofourown.org/series/2190534) Next Work → (http://archiveofourown.org/works/31724602)

Close (#)